

# Texas Veterans Voice

SPRING 2011  
texasveterans.com



A PUBLICATION OF THE TEXAS VETERANS LAND BOARD ☆ JERRY PATTERSON, CHAIRMAN



SERVING TEXAS VETERANS

## GENERAL INFORMATION

1.800.252.VETS (8387)  
512.463.5060

## VETERANS HOMES

### Ussery-Roan

Amarillo, Texas  
806.322.VETS (8387)

### Lamun-Lusk-Sanchez

Big Spring, Texas  
432.268.VETS (8387)

### Clyde W. Cosper

Bonham, Texas  
903.640.VETS (8387)

### Ambrosio Guillen

El Paso, Texas  
915.751.0967

### Frank M. Tejeda

Floresville, Texas  
830.216.9456

### Alfredo Gonzalez

McAllen, Texas  
956.682.4224

### William R. Courtney

Temple, Texas  
254.791.8280

## Tyler Texas State Veterans Home

Opening Fall, 2011

## VETERANS CEMETERIES

### Central Texas

#### State Veterans Cemetery

Killeen, Texas  
254.616.1770

### Rio Grande Valley

#### State Veterans Cemetery

Mission, Texas  
956.583.7227

#### Texas State Veterans Cemetery

at Abilene  
Abilene, Texas  
325.673.4446

### Coastal Bend

#### State Veterans Cemetery

Opening early 2012

## Eligibility Changes Open Benefits to More Veterans, Families

More than 1.7 million veterans now call Texas home. And now, regardless of whether they entered the service from Texas or just got here as quickly as they could, they can qualify for benefits from the VLB. That's because Jerry Patterson, chairman of the VLB, dropped the one-year residency requirement last year after seeing that too many deserving veterans were having to wait to use the benefits they earned. "Under the old rules, even Davy Crockett would not have qualified for VLB benefits had he survived the Alamo," Patterson said.

Texas is one of only five states to offer special veterans benefits, and VLB benefits are the best in the nation. Texas is the only state to offer a comprehensive package of land, home and home improvement loans, state veterans homes and state veterans cemeteries.

## Patterson Changes VLB Policy to Help Surviving Spouses

Patterson also announced a change in policy to allow the unmarried surviving spouse of any Texas veteran killed in action an additional full 50 basis-point discount on a home loan. The benefit—which allows Texas veterans to borrow up to \$325,000 on a 30-year loan at below market interest rates—was previously granted only to disabled veterans. This discount can save veterans tens of thousands of dollars during the life of a typical 30-year loan.

Patterson made the change after learning about the wife of a Texas veteran killed in action during his third tour in Afghanistan. She would not have qualified for this benefit when she wanted to buy a home in Kilgore that she and her late husband had dreamed of buying when he returned home. After the situation

was brought to his attention, Patterson immediately took action to change the policy. "This was an easy decision for us at the VLB—it was the right thing to do," Patterson said.

## Texas State Veterans Homes Open to Gold Star Parents

The VLB welcomed news that Congress passed a bill sponsored by U.S. Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-Clarendon, expanding access to Texas State Veterans Homes for all Gold Star Parents. A Gold Star Parent is one whose son or daughter died while serving in the Armed Forces.

Previously, federal regulations only granted this benefit to Gold Star Parents who had lost all of their children in defense of our country. "Any time you can put a little common sense into a law, it's a good thing," said Thornberry, whose district includes Amarillo. The bill, which passed both houses unanimously and was signed into law by President Barack Obama last year, was supported by all the major veterans organizations and the National Association of State Veterans Homes.

"I'm proud to finally be able to welcome every Gold Star Parent who needs care into our Texas State Veterans Homes," Patterson said. "Their sacrifice has certainly earned them a place in these homes where honor lives." The VLB has homes in Temple, Floresville, Big Spring, Bonham, McAllen, El Paso and Amarillo. Another home is under construction in Tyler.

For more information about the Texas State Veterans Homes and other state veterans benefits, please call the VLB toll free at 800.252.VETS (8387) or visit our website at [www.texasveterans.com](http://www.texasveterans.com). ☆

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# A Message from the Chairman

BY VETERANS LAND BOARD CHAIRMAN JERRY PATTERSON



Fellow Veterans:

Welcome to the latest edition of *Veterans Voice*, the newsletter of the Texas Veterans Land Board. I'm pleased to announce several major improvements to VLB benefits, which were already the best in the nation and cost Texas taxpayers virtually nothing.

One of these improvements concerns the previous one-year residency requirement to be eligible for VLB benefits.

That requirement no longer exists and you can read more about it in this edition.

The VLB also approved a change that gives the surviving spouse of any Texas veteran killed in action a major discount

on VLB home loan rates; the savings can add up to quite a sum over the life of a loan.

Another change was made possible by a bill sponsored by Congressman Mac Thornberry allowing any Gold Star Parent to reside in a Texas State Veterans Home.

Meanwhile, work continues on the Tyler Texas State Veterans Home, a radically different facility that will offer a home-like setting for its residents.

Progress also continues on the Coastal Bend State Veterans Cemetery in Nueces County, which will serve 53,000 veterans and their families who live in the area.

I hope you enjoy the spring edition of *Veterans Voice*. For more information about VLB veterans homes and cemeteries, please call our toll-free veterans hotline at 1.800.252.VETS (8387), or visit our website at [www.texasveterans.com](http://www.texasveterans.com).



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#### Texas Veterans Voice

is published by the VLB,  
a division of the  
Texas General Land Office.

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Subscriptions are free—subscribe at  
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**1.800.252.VETS (8387)**

Printed on recycled paper.

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## Servicemembers Civil Relief Act

The Texas Veterans Land Board announces a positive change for veterans to the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act as it affects VLB land, housing and home improvement loans. The VLB offers interest rate benefits for the period of activation, plus a 3 month grace period following deactivation, then 9 additional months at a rate of no more than 6 percent. Previously, benefits were extended only 90 days after deactivation. If you have been called to active duty and have a VLB land, housing or home improvement loan, please call toll-free 1.800.252.VETS (8387) for more information. ☆

## IN MEMORIAM

*Emilio R.  
Jaso*

REFUGIO COUNTY  
VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER

1934 - 2010

REST IN PEACE

## HONORING ALL WHO SERVED

"They went, they did not ask why—their country called  
—and they were proud to serve."

MAY 21  
*Armed Forces Day*

MAY 30  
*Memorial Day*

JUNE 14  
*Flag Day*

JULY 4  
*Independence Day*

The VLB respectfully salutes all veterans and active duty service personnel around the world. On behalf of all Texans, thank you for your service and sacrifice.

# Wounded Warriors Join VLB at Armed Forces Bowl

**C**ontinuing a proud tradition of many years, the VLB once again sponsored the Armed Forces Bowl Game on December 30, 2010, and escorted Wounded Warriors from Brooks Army Medical Center in San Antonio. This year, Ruben Balle of the VLB worked with the U.S. Navy to provide three Pilatus PC-12 turboprop aircraft for transportation of the Wounded Warriors from the hospital in San Antonio. The flight was only about an hour and a far cry from previous years when the trip on a chartered bus took five hours. Phil Rosenbaum, the coordinating pilot for logistics, called the flight "Hero Flight" in recognition of his passengers.

The game between the Army Black Knights and the SMU Mustangs ended with a close win for Army, 16-14. About 37,000 attended the game at the Gerald R. Ford Stadium in Dallas. VLB staff escorts were Jim Darwin, Jim Mickler, Dick Archer, Tito Garcia and Ruben Balle.

One hundred forty Wounded Warriors and their aides, families and VLB escorts were seated in the Letterman's Lounge, a private enclosed and heated suite on the 40-yard line. Bell Helicopter furnished breakfast and lunch. At half-time, the service members were presented in the north end zone and received a standing ovation. A highlight of the half-time recognition was the presentation of a mortgage-free, custom-built home to U.S. Army Spec. Hugo L. Gonzalez, who was wounded in Iraq and lost his eyesight. The home was provided by Operation Finally Home and Bluegreen Communities. Spec. Gonzalez, his wife and three daughters, live near Dallas and were completely surprised when they were given a home.



**Wounded Warriors (l-r) SSG Willman, CPT Johnson, SSG Hall and SSG Irvin with pilot Phil Rosenbaum (back).**

The VLB is pleased and proud to be a sponsor for this event every year and we look forward to continuing this opportunity to recognize and reward members of our Armed Forces who have made sacrifices while serving. ☆

## News from the Texas State Veterans Cemeteries

**State veterans cemeteries in Killeen, Abilene and Mission** hosted the Wreaths Across America event again this year. This holiday wreath-laying ceremony to honor and remember our nation's veterans has become a tradition at the state cemeteries. Veterans service organizations coordinate the event to honor all branches of the military, the Merchant Marine and POW/MIAs. The Worchester Wreath Company provides fresh-cut wreaths to all 210 National Veterans Cemeteries and to the state veterans cemeteries across the country. Veterans organization members, boy and girl scouts, and local volunteers lay the wreaths at each headstone. ☆

**The Dyess Air Force Base Chiefs Group** placed a monument at the state veterans cemetery in Abilene in December 2010. The dedication ceremony was held on the 69th anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in Oahu, Hawaii. The attack killed 2,400 Americans and on the following day, launched the United States into World War II. The newest monument at the cemetery was made and installed by the Gonzales Monument Service of Abilene. It was commissioned by the Dyess AFB Chiefs Group and is made of Georgia gray granite. The inscription reads "In honor of the heroic men and women who served in the defense of this great country—we remember." ☆

**The Central Texas State Veterans Cemetery in Killeen** was the final resting place for Karl Romanchuk thanks to the efforts of the

Missing in America Project. No one at the service knew this veteran. For nearly a decade, the WWII veteran's remains had been unclaimed. Romanchuk served in the Merchant Marine ferrying badly needed supplies to troops in Europe and the Pacific. He was 75 when he died at the VA hospital in Temple in 2002. Last year, this situation was brought to the attention of the MIA Project, a national organization that seeks to identify the remains of forgotten and abandoned veterans and give them a proper burial. Romanchuk's funeral wasn't the first time unclaimed remains were interred at this veterans cemetery. Similar burials have occurred weekly since the cemetery opened. ☆



**Fresh-cut Christmas wreaths adorn each headstone at the Central Texas State Veterans Cemetery.**



# Texas State Veterans Homes News



**1** Pearl Harbor Survivors Al Kamenicky and Ben Russell.



**2** Courtney Veterans Home supports 10th Annual Alzheimer's Memory Walk in Temple.



**3** Floresville TSVH receives gifts from Alamo DAV Chapter 5.



**4** The Brewers celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary at the Amarillo TSVH.



**5** Color Guard opens 5th anniversary celebration at McAllen home.



**6** Chairman Patterson cuts cakes to serve residents.

**1** Al Kamenicky and Ben Russell were both serving on the USS Phoenix in Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Both men survived the attack that day and now live at the Texas State Veterans Home in Temple. Last November, Chairman Jerry Patterson arranged for them to travel to Pearl Harbor, all expenses paid. They were invited by the U.S. Navy to participate in the 69th anniversary and the re-dedication of the Pearl Harbor Visitor Center. The men were escorted to the Killeen airport by 17 motorcycles flying flags and the Bell County Constable's Office provided full escort for the entire 30-mile trip. Soldiers from Ft. Hood lined the airport walkway to salute our two residents and visit with them before their departure. ☆

**2** Staff and volunteers, led by Donna Huffman and Carolyn Rumfield from the state veterans home in Temple, formed the largest team at the 10th Annual Bell County Alzheimer's Memory Walk. They raised \$6,741.90 from taco sales, quilt sales, raffles, spaghetti dinners and a silent auction. ☆

**3** Alamo DAV Chapter 5 from San Antonio donated a beautiful game ta-

ble and an Omni Cycle physical therapy machine to the residents at the Tejada State Veterans Home in Floresville. J.R. Garza, longtime advocate for veterans and other members of the DAV Chapter 5, brought the gifts, visited with the residents and participated in a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new items. The therapy equipment alone can cost over \$7,000. ☆

**4** Navy veteran Clarence Brewer and his wife Earlene celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary at the Ussery-Roan Texas State Veterans Home in Amarillo. The Brewers are both residents of the home. ☆

**5** Members of American Legion Post #101 of Pharr served as the Honor Guard at the 5th Anniversary celebration for the Alfredo Gonzalez state veterans home in McAllen. Members of Post #101 posted the colors at the celebration and visited with the residents. Local, state and congressional elected officials participated. ☆

**6** Chairman Jerry Patterson cut several cakes to serve to residents at the 5th anniversary celebration at the

Ambrosio Guillen State Veterans Home in El Paso on September 30, 2010. Over 200 visitors attended and local and state elected officials participated in the program. ☆

## more news

A Halloween costume party followed by a Veterans Day celebration was enjoyed by the residents at the Lamun-Lusk-Sanchez home in Big Spring. At the Veterans Day celebration, a Color Guard from Goodfellow AFB posted the colors and Big Spring Mayor Duncan spoke to the residents. At a recent soup cook-off at the Floresville home, residents enjoyed many varieties of homemade soups prepared by members of the staff. Winners were caldo de res, shrimp soup and potato soup. On November 13, The Rio Grande Valley South Texas Chapter of the Harley Owners Group rode to the Freddy Gonzalez home in McAllen to celebrate Veterans Day with the residents and presented each with a plaque in honor of his or her service. The Ladies Auxiliary of the Judson VFW Post #2059 in San Antonio presented the Floresville home with a check for \$1,000 to meet the special needs of the residents. ☆

# Work Continues in Tyler and Corpus Christi



The Community Building Porte Cochere in Tyler.



Workers making progress on the cemetery's entrance in Corpus Christi.



Looking toward the Tyler Texas State Veterans Home.



Columbarium wall footing is completed at the cemetery.



Pulling electric cable for one of the veterans home buildings.



Construction continues on the committal shelter at the cemetery.



Final roof installation work on one of the veterans home buildings.



A view of the cemetery's administration and maintenance complex.



# Memorial Day for Remembering All Who Died

*By Jerry Patterson, Commissioner of the Texas General Land Office*

Some men are meant to be warriors—some men are not. For those warriors who lost their lives in service to their country we will stop, pray and remember as we observe Memorial Day.

It's more than a day at the park, or just another day off from work.

Enjoy the holiday, but remember its purpose is to honor the sacrifices made by so many to protect the freedoms that are too often taken for granted.

Not all men who died for their country chose their path—this does not diminish their sacrifice. Involuntary soldiers have died in every war—from the War Between the States to Vietnam. Their sacrifice is not measured by whether or not they volunteered.

The honor we bestow on Memorial Day is meant for all those who gave their lives in defense of our freedoms regardless of their path to service. The Vietnam Wall is filled with names of reluctant participants. They are warriors none the less—they are heroes and they are to be honored.

It was during Vietnam that many Americans questioned our participation in a conflict that seemed to some to have nothing to do with preserving our freedoms. As a Vietnam Veteran, I harbor no animosity to those who disagreed with the war—there was plenty to disagree about.

The same rule applies today. Those who oppose the war

are guaranteed by our Constitution that their opinion will be heard.

However, we cannot allow opinion or political grandstanding to overshadow the realities of the war or our Armed Forces. Those who advocate an unrealistic troop withdrawal are not dealing in reality.

Such a hasty withdrawal places our servicemen and women at greater risk. To say nothing of the calamitous effect that such a withdrawal will have upon the morale of our Armed Forces.

Yes, it may be unpopular to stay the course in Iraq. But the ability to withstand withering public opposition in defense of what one knows to be right is the definition of leadership.

Americans must place a higher standard on those who seek public office, including the ability to defend unpopular decisions and in so doing show moral leadership worthy of the public trust.

This Memorial Day, as we remember all those who died for this country — voluntarily or not — let us recommit ourselves to electing leaders whose actions will honor rather than diminish their sacrifice.

*Jerry Patterson is a former State Senator, Vietnam Veteran and retired Marine Lt. Colonel.*

## Less Confusion, More Benefits from the Texas Veterans Commission

**T**exas veterans deserve to get the most from the benefits they've earned, and so the state of Texas created the Texas Veterans Commission as the official advocate for Texas veterans. Its mission is to be the most helpful place for Texas veterans to receive assistance with their state and federal benefits.

Highly trained benefits experts, most of whom are veterans, provide claims representation and counseling, employment services and education programs at over 140 Texas Veterans Commission offices.

Accessing benefits can feel overwhelming. Between medical records, paperwork, appointments and busy schedules, it can also feel like a hassle. The Texas Veterans Commission can help. It will manage the entire process and get veterans and their families the benefits they deserve.

To start receiving assistance today, visit the Texas Veterans Commission website at [www.tvc.state.tx.us](http://www.tvc.state.tx.us).

### Free College for Children of Texas Veterans

If you were living in Texas when you joined the military, your children may be able to get a free college education at a Texas public university. A recent change to the Hazlewood Act provides the option for veterans to pass their Hazlewood benefits to their children. To see if you and your children are eligible go to <http://www.tvc.state.tx.us/Hazlewood.html>. ☆

## From the Editor

**VLB Chairman Patterson shared good news** with Valley veterans about the opening of the new 120,000-square-foot ambulatory surgery and outpatient specialty care service facility in Harlingen. The facility, located at 2601 Veterans Drive, is part of the VA Texas Valley Coastal Bend Health Care System. Call 956.291.9000 for information. ☆

**The Friends of the National Vietnam War Museum** in Mineral Wells hosted a Tenth Annual Benefit in Weatherford on March 26, 2011. For more information about this museum or about offering your support, contact them at [NationalVNWarMuseum.org](http://NationalVNWarMuseum.org) or write to P.O. Box 146, Mineral Wells, Texas 76068. ☆

**Last surviving WWI veteran dies in W. Virginia at age 110:** Frank Buckles entered military service at age 16 after lying about his age, was a civilian POW in the Philippines in WWII, and died at home on February 27, 2011. ☆

# VLB Continues to Host Benefits Fairs Across Texas



**Veterans find out about their benefits at the fair in Dallas.**

**H**osted by the Veterans Land Board and the Texas Veterans Commission, these benefits fairs offer information and assistance on veterans loan programs, state veterans homes and cemeteries, VA benefits and assistance with VA claims. If you want to discuss a VA claim, please bring your file or claim number to the fair. Representatives from the Social Security Administration and the Small Business Administration will also be available at most of the fairs. The

Texas State Veterans Homes nursing staff will provide free health screenings on site.

In 2010 and the first fair in 2011, thousands of veterans attended the benefits fairs around the state. Parking and admission is always free and everyone is welcome to attend. Drawings for door prizes continue throughout the three-hour event.

All the Benefits Fairs are come-and-go with continuous programs, and will begin at 10:00 a.m. and be open through 1:00 p.m. for your convenience.

Please call toll-free 1.800.252.VETS (8387) or visit [www.texasveterans.com](http://www.texasveterans.com) for complete information on these benefits fairs. ☆

## Upcoming Benefits Fairs

**APRIL 9**  
San Angelo  
San Angelo Coliseum

**JUNE 25**  
Tyler  
University of Texas  
at Tyler

**AUGUST 20**  
San Antonio  
Live Oak Civic Center

**Plan to Attend a  
Benefits Fair  
Near You!**

## Participate in Voices of Veterans Oral History Program

**H**undreds of Texas veterans have already participated in the Voices of Veterans Oral History Program, sharing their vivid memories of the roles they played in past conflicts.

The Voices of Veterans Oral History Program seeks to record the stories of Texas veterans and archive the transcripts in the Office of Veterans Records for future researchers, historians, genealogists and the general public. Every veteran has a story to tell, and this program will ensure these stories of courage and service can inspire Texans for generations to come.

Any veteran interested in including his or her story in the Voices of Veterans Program should contact the VLB at 1.800.252.VETS (8387), or send an e-mail to [vlbinfo@glo.texas.gov](mailto:vlbinfo@glo.texas.gov). Oral history in-

terviews can be conducted in person at the VLB in Austin, or by telephone from anywhere in Texas. Interviews usually last from one to two hours. ☆



[www.voicesofveterans.com](http://www.voicesofveterans.com)

## VLB Offers Wide Range of Veterans Benefits

### **Low-interest, long-term loans for land, homes and home improvements:**

- ★ \$80,000 land loans, 30-year, fixed-rate, minimum one acre
- ★ Up to \$325,000 for purchase of a primary residence, 15- or 30-year fixed rate terms
- ★ Up to \$25,000 for 20-year term for home improvements, no down payment

### **Dignified places of rest for Texas veterans, their spouses and dependent children at Texas State Veterans Cemeteries**

- ★ Abilene
- ★ Killeen
- ★ Mission
- ★ Construction is under way at the Corpus Christi site

### **Affordable, long-term nursing care facilities exclusively for Texas veterans, their spouses and Gold Star Parents at Texas State Veterans Homes**

Amarillo ★ Big Spring ★ Bonham ★ El Paso ★ Floresville ★ McAllen ★ Temple  
Coming to Tyler in 2011



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## Next VLB Forfeited Land Sale

**Tuesday, April 26, 2011 at 9:30 a.m.**

Bids must be received no later than 4:30 p.m. on Monday, April 25, 2011. A bid may not be presented on the day of the sale.  
No funds should be submitted prior to the sale.

**Open to the public at the Stephen F. Austin Building, 1700 N. Congress, Room 940A, Austin, Texas**

At the last sale on October 26, 2010, the VLB offered 35 tracts for sale and sold 18 of those tracts for over \$800,000. Unsold tracts from prior sales (Type II tracts) are available for sale to the general public on a first come, first served basis. Listings of tracts available from all previous sales are posted on our website at [www.texasveterans.com](http://www.texasveterans.com). Any of those tracts that have been on the website for more than six months are now being marketed and sold by a private auction company, Hudson & Marshall. For more information on these tracts, visit the Hudson & Marshall website at [www.TXLandAuction.com](http://www.TXLandAuction.com).

Type I tracts offered at the next sale on April 26, 2011 are also listed at the same website. For a printed copy of the listings for the April 2011 sale or for any other information, call toll-free at 1.800.252.VETS (8387).

**NEW: There is a limit on the number of bids you may submit. You may bid on a total of six tracts. You must indicate a bid preference on each bid or the bid will be rejected. All bids must have original signatures. See the instructions included in the listings book or on the website at [www.texasveterans.com](http://www.texasveterans.com).**

**ARE YOU CURRENTLY ON ACTIVE DUTY? DID YOU SERVE IN THE NATIONAL GUARD?**

**Please check our eligibility requirements in the forfeited land sale listings book  
or at the website or call toll-free at 1-800-252-VETS (8387).**

### STAY IN TOUCH ONLINE!



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Be sure to visit our Facebook page and our website for VLB loan rates, current news and photos, and event information. Let us know what you think!